

Correspondence

The Editorial Board will be pleased to receive and consider for publication correspondence containing information of interest to physicians or commenting on issues of the day. Letters ordinarily should not exceed 600 words, and must be typewritten, double-spaced and submitted in duplicate (the original typescript and one copy). Authors will be given an opportunity to review any substantial editing or abridgment before publication.

National Health Insurance and the AMA House of Delegates

TO THE EDITOR: Like a huge, unstoppable glacier, National Health Insurance (NHI) is grinding down upon us. That was the uncomfortable consensus of the House of Delegates of the American Medical Association at the recent meeting in Philadelphia.

It was not a decision easily arrived at. Only after many hours of hearings in the reference committee, and much heated oratory and parliamentary maneuvering on the floor of the House, were the delegates able to vote favorably on a positive AMA program.

The bone of contention? HR 6222. This is the bill the Board of Trustees hope to present to the Congress as a positive AMA approach to the problem of NHI. It is a compromise. It recommends catastrophic coverage, comprehensive health care insurance, a program that is compulsory for the employer but voluntary for the employee. It would build on the present private insurance industry and on our existing pluralistic health care system.

Delegates from Louisiana, Oklahoma and California, among others, fought tooth and nail, and often with eloquence and passion, against any legislation leading to NHI. The proponents, on the other hand, pleaded for acceptance of this compromise measure, asserting that to do less would be to go back to our old negative, reactionary stance. Moreover, they argued, the legislators who are the friends of medicine are begging us for some sort of a bill to use against those who would give us far less favorable legislation should we take a negative, uncooperative stand.

"What's wrong with negative actions?" asked an opponent who had obviously done his homework. "Out of the Ten Commandments there are seven negative ones. There are 52 negatives in the

Constitution of the United States." Furthermore, the opposition contended that no matter what kind of a bill you give them, Congress will only use it as a base on which to build a far more comprehensive, socialistic program.

So it went, a seesaw battle. It seemed evident that the delegates individually wanted no more government medicine. But collectively they were resigned to following the more pragmatic, realistic course.

In the end, after the votes in favor of HR 6222 had been counted, there was no elation. More than one delegate headed home with the hope in his heart that somehow the NHI glacier might be slowed or stopped by the increased fear of a mountainous national debt, and that the specter of Britain's near-bankruptcy might bring a new awakening of legislative conscience.

Yet, who knows—will that glacier only move faster down through that warm and sunny Carter valley?

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A Munchausen Alert

TO THE EDITOR: Two recent letters to the *Annals of Internal Medicine* have described a patient who was felt to be a bonafide example of Munchausen syndrome.^{1,2} This now famous patient was recently in our facility and provided an unforgettable experience.

In mid-December a 44-year-old white man was admitted to the surgery service of the Sacramento Medical Center for evaluation of swelling in his left hand. Since he admitted to being an abuser of parenterally given meperidine hydrochloride (Demerol®), it was felt that an infection had to be ruled out. He claimed that he had chronic leu-